



State of Louisiana

Parish of Lafayette

Affidavit of Francis C. Grevemberg

Before me, the undersigned authority personally came and appeared Francis C. Grevemberg, who, being by me first duly sworn did depose and say that:

I served as superintendent of State Police under the late Gov. Robert F. Kennon during the years 1952-1955. As a native Louisianian, I have always had a deep interest in the late Gov. and U. S. Sen. Huey P. Long. During

my tour of duty I had occasion to meet and work with many state troopers who had served during Gov. Long's statewide political career from 1928, when he was elected governor until 1935, when he died of gunshot wounds.

During my tour of duty the principal priority of the State Police was the patrolling of Louisiana highways. And a massive crackdown on crime and vice in Louisiana. This included gambling, **white slavery**, prostitution and narcotics trafficking which was rampant in our state. In October 1953 I decided to raid a small casino in North Louisiana. I selected four troopers to accompany me in my car. About 40 minutes into the drive, two of the three troopers seated on the back seat began reminiscing about their years on the force. Two of the men, **Lt. Tugwell and Trooper Martin**, said they were hoping to make 30 years before retiring.

I asked them when they first joined the force. One said the year the State Police was organized as a highway patrol. The other said he had joined a year later. I said, "You are both more than half-way. You don't have much longer to wait." They agreed and then summed reminiscing.

They told a number of anecdotes about Gov. Long when he served from 1928 to 1932. They recalled how he used the State Police. For example, when he decided to fire a department head, he would send in a squad of troopers the night before. **The department would be sealed off until the troopers had searched every file to make sure there was no piece of evidence in the files that would tend to incriminate him. After the search, Long proceeded to fire the department head.**

I said nothing while they were talking. I just listened. They continued to talk and turned to the subject of the events of September 8, 1935, when Gov. Long was shot in the State Capitol. The following is my recollection of what they said.

I am combining the comments of both troopers into one narrative. The troopers were walking behind Sen. Long and two of his bodyguards, Joe Messina and Murphy Roden, were walking on either side of him. The group was well into the hallway when a man who was standing against the side of the wall opposite the governor's office started shouting at the senator and tried to punch him in the face. Murphy Roden grabbed the man and threw him to the floor.

Almost immediately, Roden began firing at the man. As the first bullet entered the fallen man's body, he shuddered and stretched out into a prone position against the junction of the marble floor and the marble wall. The bullets were piercing his body, striking the marble floor and ricocheting after passing through the corpse. The bullets bounced all around the hall until, all their energy spent, they would fall to the floor. Murphy had fired about four shots when Joe Messina opened fire.

Joe Messina's last two shots hit the marble wall then ricocheted down through the man's body, struck the marble floor and ricocheted up from the floor, **hitting the senator in the groin.**

Other bodyguards opened fire. **Both Messina and Roden emptied their .38 caliber Smith and Wesson pistols.** Soon, pandemonium broke out in the hall. Everyone was trying to escape the ricocheting bullets and there was a lot of pushing and shoving taking place as people tried to get out of the way.

It is possible that all **12 bullets** didn't go through the fallen man's body because the bodyguards might have been pushed while firing. This could be ***why Joe Messina's last two shots hit the wall and ricocheted off the floor, striking Sen. Long.*** After the firing stopped, the body was searched. Papers on the body indicated that it was Carl Austin Weiss, a Baton Rouge ear, nose and throat physician. They continued searching the body for a weapon. They found nothing.

One of the troopers in the car with me, **Major John deArmond, said the night before, he was in a State Police group which had raided a barroom in Baton Rouge frequented by Negroes.** When the lawmen entered, a large dice game was in progress. As soon as the raiding party shouted out that they were the State Police and it was a raid, the lights went out. When the lights came back on, there were several switchblade knives and several revolvers and handguns on the floor.

The trooper telling the story said he liked one of the handguns because it was a .25 caliber that he thought would be nice for his wife. He explained that it was in fairly good condition but it lacked a firing pin and thus it couldn't be fired. Also, there was no ammunition in the revolver. He planned to take the handgun to a gunsmith to have it repaired and he was

still carrying it on his person Sunday night, after the altercation in the state capitol. **When it was determined that Dr. Weiss had no weapon on him, he offered the revolver as a “plant” or a “throw-down” to prove that the doctor actually was armed. The gun was placed in Weiss’ hand by Major John deArmond.**

All this happened in the corridor outside the governor’s office. Sen. Long had been taken to the hospital. ***The trooper said that Joe Messina was very distraught and kept repeating, over and over, “I think my last two rounds hit him.”***

The trooper telling the story said he helped pick up the spent cartridges and empty casings found. I interrupted his narrative to ask, “Are you sure there were no other bullets or casings that somebody other than you might have found?” ***Major John deArmond*** told me “no,” adding that the items picked up from the floor constituted positive proof that the bodyguards killed both Dr. Weiss and Sen. Long. ***According to the trooper, Major John deArmond, when Gen. Louis Guerre, Supt. of State Police found out that Sen. Long had been shot with .38 caliber bullets, he returned the .25 caliber pistol that had been placed in Weiss’ hand, saying that the gun was too small. He replaced the smaller pistol with a .32 caliber handgun that was taken from Dr. Weiss’ car by other troopers.***

One of the troopers, on the back seat, (I think it was trooper Martin) said in the early morning hours after the shooting they checked with the Motor Vehicle Bureau since they had retrieved the keys from Dr. Weiss’ body and

obtained the information on the license number, type of car, etc. which was registered in Dr. Weiss' name. They went back to the Capitol grounds, found Dr. Weiss' car, and found the .32 caliber handgun in the car. He said the handgun was loaded and it was obvious that it hadn't been fired recently. He said they went back to the State Police Headquarters and gave the handgun to Gen. Guerre. The trooper said that Gen. Guerre was emphatic that none of the bodyguards say anything about what had happened because the two bodyguards in question, Messina and Roden, could be charged with gross misconduct and even murder.

I asked the storyteller if perhaps Gen. Guerre was trying to establish Huey Long as a martyr, in the event he should die? He told me no. He said it was simply a case of trying to protect the bodyguards who were, in turn, simply trying to protect the senator.

And then I made a mistake.

I said, "It appears to me that all of the actions following the shooting were a conspiracy to cover-up the accidental death of Sen. Long and the killing of Dr. Weiss."

After I made that unfortunate statement, the bodyguards became very quiet. The following day, I had the State Police lawyer, Drew McGinnis, on hand and I asked several of the troopers to repeat the story they had told me the previous evening. They denied that they had ever told me such a story. I called in the other troopers and they backed up what the others

had said. *Later, my bodyguard and driver told me that he was sorry but he had to deny that he had heard these troopers tell that story about how Sen. Long was killed.*

He said it has been an unwritten law among the troopers that the Long and Weiss killings were never to be discussed. During my tenure as Supt. of State Police I had occasion to talk with other troopers who were on the force at the time of the incident. To a man, they maintained that, *while they had no personal knowledge of what took place*, the stories that went around the State Police were the same as I had described. Later, I had occasion to discuss the shooting of Senator Long with a newly hired Captain of the Louisiana State Police, *Capt. R. M. Walker*, who was a trooper at the time, and he told me that he was present in the Troop Headquarters when the troopers were in the process of calling and talking with the Motor Vehicle Bureau and what he heard was exactly as the trooper had described it in my automobile.

He said (the Captain) that it was common knowledge that one of the bodyguards had accidentally killed Sen. Long. That is, it was common knowledge among the troopers who were on the force at the time of the Weiss – Long incident.

My father was Supt. of Buildings and Grounds for the State of Louisiana under Gov. Sam Jones. Part of his responsibility was the maintenance of the State Capitol. He had been friends with Dr. Arthur Vidrine, the surgeon who operated on Sen. Long. *Dr. Vidrine told my father that he removed two .38 caliber bullets from the senator's body. He was of the opinion*

that Sen. Long was killed by his own bodyguards, since he understood that Dr. Weiss was carrying a .32 pistol. Actually, Dr. Weiss carried no firearm.

After *the troopers refused to admit that they had told me the story or that they had heard it told to me*, I called Wilburn Lunn. Wilburn was executive counsel to Gov. Kennon and was a friend of long standing. He and I had met in Italy during World War II. Colonel Lunn was full colonel executive officer and I was a lieutenant colonel G-3 in a brigade.

Col. Lunn was instrumental in having Gov. Kennon appoint me to the position of Supt. of State Police. Col. Lunn asked me to meet him in the governor's office as soon as possible. I immediately left my office to see him. I told him the complete story of my encounter with the troopers who were with the bodyguards. *He said it didn't surprise him because he had heard the same story told my different individuals.*

I told Col. Lunn that I needed his help to get the legislature to create a committee with full powers of subpoenas to investigate the death of Sen. Long. I told him that I wanted to question, under oath, the troopers who had told me the story, as well as anyone who was in the State Capitol corridor when Sen. Long was shot. I told him that I wanted to have Dr. Vidrine and ask him about the story that he told my father, namely that he removed two .38 caliber bullets from Sen. Long's body. *I also told him I would like to have my father testify about the conversation he had with Dr. Vidrine. I told him that, in my judgment, this was the only way*

he could get these people to testify truthfully – if they were under oath and subject to the state’s perjury laws.

Col. Lunn told me, “Grevy, you’re on the right track but your train is pulling into the wrong station.” He proceeded to tell me the uphill battle I was facing. First, he explained, I would be facing a legislature whose membership was dominated by Long sympathizers. He continued, saying that **the number of gambling raids I had conducted throughout the state had alienated local officials.**

Despite the prohibition against gambling in the state constitution, this vice was rampant and local officials in the state were taking bribes to allow it to continue. Col. Lunn said that legislators from these parishes would be influenced by local officials who would never be in favor of anything I proposed.

I tried to explain to Col. Lunn that I was only following the mandate of the constitution and that I always contacted local officials before conducting any raids so that they could clean up their own house by closing down illegal activities.

He interrupted me, saying, “I know all this ‘Grevy’, but you don’t have a chance of accomplishing what you want to do. My advice to you is to forget it because I don’t believe you have a prayer.” Reluctantly, I followed his advice. I dropped the matter, considering it something that was beyond my capability to do anything about.

Francis C. Grevemberg

Sept. 24, 1993

At the time I gave this affidavit, when I arrived in Lafayette I didn't expect to give this statement, and I hadn't thought about it in a number of years, therefore, ***I wasn't certain of the names of the troopers until I had more time to reflect on the occasion.*** I was also able to check with my old secretary, at that time, who remembered these names, too. I am positive that Maj. John deArmond was the person on the back seat telling of the happenings, that evening, during the killing of Senator Huey P. Long by Trooper Joseph Messina. deArmond was seated immediately behind me on the right hand side of the rear seat and next to him was seated Lt. Tugwell, and to Tugwell's left was seated Trooper Martin. Sgt. Martin Fritcher was driving, and I was seated in the front passenger's seat.

Francis C. Grevemberg

June 8, 1997